

**NPHET paper on advising Government in relation to
public health restrictive measures in advance of Phase 4 on 20 July 2020**

14 July 2020

DRAFT UNDER DELIBERATION

Action required

- For noting
- For discussion
- For decision

(for ease of reference – new suggested policy in red font)

Background:

Following the discussions of NPHET at its meeting of the 18th June 2020, the NPHET submitted its *Advice to Government in relation to realigning the Public Health Framework Approach to reducing restrictive measures into two final Phases* dated 18th June 2020. This was incorporated by Government into the *Revised Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business*.

On 25th June 2020, the NPHET recommended to Government the commencement of the realigned Phase 3 measures with effect from 29th June 2020. These recommendations were adopted by Government and commenced on 29 June 2020.

Measures for consideration by NPHET in advising Government in advance of Phase 4 on 20 July 2020:

Subject to the current epidemiological situation, the NPHET may wish to discuss and give consideration to advising Government as set out in **Appendix I** to this paper.

In developing the public health advice to Government set out in Appendix I in relation to the reduction of the public health restrictive measures, the NPHET's attention is drawn to the following:

- the report to Government prepared by the Department of Health in accordance with the decision-making framework provided for in the *Roadmap for Reopening Society & Business* and in particular:
 - the latest data regarding the progression of the disease,
 - the capacity and resilience of the health service in terms of hospital and ICU occupancy, and
 - the capacity of the programme of sampling, testing and contact tracing;
- the experiences internationally, including in some countries, which have seen significant increases in cases of COVID-19 infection, including outbreaks in some settings and regions, following the easing of public health measures, resulting in the requirement to reimpose public health restrictive measures in those countries and / or regions of those countries;
- ongoing evidence and information regarding the experiences of members of the public, adherence to the public health personal behaviours and social distancing measures in place through regular quantitative and qualitative public opinion research and focus groups, analysis of non-health information sources such as transportation, mobility, and congregation data;
- the NPHET's Advice to Government in relation to realigning the *Public Health Framework Approach* to reducing restrictive measures into two final Phases of 18 June 2020;
- that there are other important considerations for Government with regard to the reduction of measures, such as social and economic considerations, while noting the potential effects of the current measures on the wider health and wellbeing of the population.

In providing this public health advice to Government the NPHET–

- having due regard to the recent ECDC advice that “*the pandemic is not over, and hypothetical forecasting indicates a rise in cases is likely in the coming weeks*” and its concerns regarding the current trend of increasing incidence of COVID-19 in the community, emphasised the importance of now redoubling efforts across Government and society to enhance compliance with hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette,

physical distancing, the wearing of face coverings and all public health measures to the greatest extent possible to minimise the risk of a resurgence of infection in Ireland, so as to avoid the necessity to reintroduce stricter measures,

- underlined that it is impossible to predict what the future trajectory of the COVID-19 disease will be in Ireland or provide assurance that it is safe to reduce the public health measures,
- in light of the deteriorating pandemic situation globally, reiterated its previous public health advice regarding travel, noting that the travel-related introduction of the disease is now a significant and growing concern in terms of increasing the risk of a potential second-wave of the disease in Ireland. Consequently, it is important that, at this time, people in Ireland are encouraged to continue to follow public health advice against non-essential travel outside of Ireland and that all measures are utilised to discourage travel from overseas to Ireland,
- expressed its concern regarding the increase in the number of cases in younger people and particularly those aged under 45 in recent weeks. While it is recognised that people will want to socialise and engage with friends again after the extended period of restrictive measures, it is important that, people of all ages do so safely through maintaining good hygiene practices and physical distancing as well as limiting the number of people that we meet with, all to protect each other from infection spread,
- committed to clear consistent sustained accessible risk communication strategy with the public and other key groups, to continually re-emphasise collective behaviours and solidarity in limiting the spread of infection for the foreseeable future and support the desired behavioural change through ongoing communication and education initiatives,
- emphasised the continued importance of ongoing monitoring and review of epidemiological trends and health system impact of COVID-19 such that any changes in the overall situation will be detected rapidly, in order that future advice to Government, and health service measures and responses can be implemented based on the transmission patterns of the disease, the trajectory and velocity of change, and the evolving analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the population and health system capacity,
- reiterated the need for continued enhancement of the HSE's sampling, testing, contact tracing, surveillance and reporting processes, with a particular focus on reinforcing the public health management of complex cases and clusters, especially among vulnerable populations, higher risk populations, including healthcare workers,
- emphasised a continued focus on ongoing public health responses, infection prevention and control, surveillance including the prevention and management of outbreaks in different settings including workplaces, residential and other settings, as well as ongoing implementation, monitoring, review and re-calibration of public health measures including regionalised, localised or sector-specific responses, bearing in mind the associated public health risks.

Appendix 1 – NPHEt paper on advising Government in relation to public health restrictive measures in advance of Phase 4 on 20 July 2020

The NPHEt, taking note of the current status of the COVID-19 disease in Ireland in the early weeks of July 2020, the deteriorating pandemic situation globally and the current overall public health risk, advises that the Government give consideration to implementing with effect from the 20th July 2020 the following measures:

Section 1: General advice & Public Health Checklist

Public health messages

It is recommended that the following updated general public health messages continue to be communicated:

- wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub even if your hands are not visibly dirty;
- practise good respiratory hygiene, that is, when coughing and sneezing, cover your mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – discard tissue immediately into a closed bin and clean your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water;
- maintain physical distancing, that is, leave at least 2 metres (6 feet) distance between yourself and other people, particularly those who are coughing, sneezing and have a fever;
- avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth – if you touch your eyes, nose or mouth with your contaminated hands, you can transfer the virus from the surface to yourself;
- remember that this disease spreads easily in crowded environments, therefore avoid crowded places as much as possible, leave if a location becomes overcrowded and physical distancing becomes difficult;
- everyone should be vigilant of the symptoms of the virus and should self-isolate and seek medical care as quickly as possible if they have even mild symptoms, including flu-like symptoms. When self-isolating, stay at home and do not go to work or school and the household contacts of a confirmed or suspected case, should follow public health advice and restrict their movements until advised otherwise;
- Everybody in society should exercise their own judgement and take personal responsibility for decisions that they make about the risk of infection to themselves and to others in different situations. The Public Health Checklist (*distance, activity, time and environment*) is intended to provide assistance to individuals and families, as well as organisations, business etc in making decisions about how to assess the risk of different activities and take actions to lower the risk of spreading infection

Section 2: Community Health

The following are recommended:

Face Coverings

- Face coverings are an important additional hygiene measure to hand hygiene and cough and sneeze etiquette where physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- The wearing of face coverings is now mandatory on public transport.
- **It is recommended that face coverings should also be mandatory in indoor retail environments.**

Cocooning

- Cocooning for those aged 70 years and over and the medically vulnerable continues to be recommended for their safety. It is important that people who are cocooning feel empowered to exercise their own judgement and autonomy regarding the extent to which they consider the cocooning guidance is appropriate to their individual circumstances.

- For people aged 70 years and over and the medically vulnerable who wish to visit others, receive visitors in their home, attending shops, and engage in other activities, it continues to be recommended that they:
 - (and their visitors) maintain strict hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette,
 - continue to strictly adhere to the physical distancing guidance of 2m,
 - avoiding touching surfaces and cleaning surfaces touched by visitors,
 - use face coverings when attending shops or other busy public areas.
- Those cocooning who are planning to travel within and outside their region should acquaint themselves with the level of transmission of the virus in the relevant area, and consider how best to protect themselves.
- See HPSC's *Guidance on cocooning to protect people over 70 years and those extremely medically vulnerable from COVID-19* for useful practical guidance.

Family and non-family social visits

In light of the current status of the COVID-19 disease in Ireland in the early weeks of July 2020, the significant risk of infection spread and recent evidence of outbreaks in Ireland associated with groups meeting indoors especially in private homes which are uncontrolled environments, and the current overall public health risk, it is recommended that–

- gatherings in private homes be limited to visitors from no more than 2 other households¹,
- no specific restriction is placed on the number of people that can visit another household, however, the number should be limited so that adequate physical distancing and ventilation of the home can be maintained bearing in mind the size of the home.

Overseas travel to and from Ireland

In light of the deteriorating pandemic situation globally, the significant risk of imported COVID-19 cases to Ireland from overseas and the current overall public health risk, the NPHET reiterates its previous public health advice regarding travel, noting that the travel-related introduction of the disease is now a significant and growing concern in terms of increasing the risk of a potential second-wave of the disease in Ireland. Consequently, the following continue to be recommended:

- NPHET continues to advise against non-essential travel outside of Ireland at this time;
- All measures be utilised to discourage travel from overseas to Ireland at this time.

Section 3: Mass Gatherings of People

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is widely recognised that mass gatherings of people can amplify the transmission of the virus and have the potential to significantly impact on the health service and wider COVID-19 response. Mass gatherings are events where there is a concentration of people at a specific location for a specific purpose over a set period of time and constitute a diverse range of gatherings such as sports, music/entertainment, religious events, family events (e.g. weddings, funerals etc.) large conferences and exhibitions, as well as community, charity events and other types of events.

On 29 June in line with the Revised Roadmap on Reopening Society & Business, NPHET's Advice to Government recommended that mass gatherings be restricted to 50 persons indoors and 200 persons outdoors. Research indicates that being outdoors is safer than being indoors when it comes to the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Outdoor gatherings pose a lower risk of transmission because wind disperses the viral droplets. Open spaces prevent the virus from building up in concentrated amounts and being inhaled, which can happen indoors when infected people exhale in a confined space for extended

¹ Similar to Phase 3 measures implemented in Scotland on 13 July <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-staying-safe-and-protecting-others/pages/seeing-friends-and-family/>

periods of time. A Japanese study found that people are nearly 20 times more likely to contract COVID-19 indoors than outdoors². The WHO recommends that as a mitigation measure for gatherings, they should take place outdoors rather than indoors.

Consequently, in light of the current status of the COVID-19 disease in Ireland in the early weeks of July 2020, the deteriorating pandemic situation globally and the current overall public health risk, it is recommended that for the duration of Phase 4 until 10th August 2020–

- indoor mass gatherings continue to be restricted to 50 persons, and
- outdoor mass gatherings be increased to 500 persons due to the evidence that outdoor gatherings pose a lower risk of transmission of the virus than indoor gatherings.

With regard to mass gatherings, the following should be borne in mind:

- Mass gatherings should be organised in advance to enable adequate planning by organisers so that prevention and control measures can be implemented, and physical distancing can be maintained so as to reduce the risk of transmission and avoid strain on health services;
- The mass gathering numbers listed above are total numbers of people at mass gathering events including organisers, participants and attendees;
- Mass gatherings operating in line with the limits above should comply with the Public Health Checklist and physical distancing, having regard to the size of the venue;
- Adopting a cautious approach considering the high risk of infection spread at mass gatherings, it is recommended that marquees, tents, circuses etc. be considered indoor venues for the purposes of these mass gatherings restrictions.

Section 4: Restrictive public health measures:

The following are recommended:

Education, Childcare and Children's Measures:

- Re-commence crèches, childminders and pre-schools for children of all workers in phased manner with physical distancing and other requirements applying as per the HPSC Guidance.

Retail Activities - Fashion retail outlets changing rooms:

- Re-open changing rooms in fashion retail outlets, subject to appropriate storage and cleaning of clothing returned or handled extensively, in light of the lifespan of the virus on materials and fabrics.

Pubs, bars, hotel bars, casinos etc.:

In light of the current status of the COVID-19 disease in Ireland in the early weeks of July 2020, the significant risk of infection spread, the evidence of outbreaks associated with pubs and bars in other countries and the current overall public health risk, it is recommended that–

- Pubs, bars, hotel bars, casinos are to remain closed until 10 August. Resumption after this time will be considered.

Nightclubs & discotheques:

In light of the current status of the COVID-19 disease in Ireland in the early weeks of July 2020, the significant risk of infection spread associated with nightclubs and discos, which by their nature are not intended to be seated environments where people can maintain 2 metre physical distance, the evidence of outbreaks

² <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.02.28.20029272v2>

associated with nightclubs and discotheques in other countries and the current overall public health risk, it is recommended that–

- Nightclubs and discotheques are to remain closed until 10 August. Resumption after this time will be considered.

Economic Activity (Work):

- All workers and businesses that can work remotely from home should continue to do so to the maximum extent possible.
- Organisations should continue to deploy their own plans for prioritising onsite working arrangements by those workers that are required to work onsite utilising all options to limit the number of workers interacting with each other at any one time e.g. shift work, staggered hours, designated teams working always together, defined break times, etc.
- Employers should work proactively, including with authorities and health authorities where necessary, to limit the spread of disease within or connected with the workplace and to mitigate the effects of workplace outbreaks should such occur.
- Businesses and organisations should apply the Return to Work Safely Protocol - COVID-19 Specific National Protocol for Employers and Workers published by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, including having a COVID-19 Response Plan in place.
- Workers should not come to work, should self-isolate and should seek medical care if they have even mild symptoms, including flu-like symptoms, and workers who are contacts of a confirmed or suspected case, should follow public health advice and not come to work until advised otherwise.

Transport Measures:

Those providing transport services, whether commercially or in a private capacity, or where vehicle sharing is a normal feature of work or activity, should –

- to facilitate contact tracing, put arrangements in place to record or be in a position to gain access to the contact details of passengers that spend two hours or more on a conveyance,
- to reduce the risk for those using public transport, provide hand sanitizer for use by passengers in light of the importance of communal handrails for those using such transport,
- maintain arrangements to ensure that passengers on public and other communal transportation wear face coverings where appropriate, for the protection of other travellers,
- continue to encourage the public to stagger travelling times on public transport in order to maintain physical distancing on public transport.